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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001823

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: JERUSALEM-BASED NGO REQUESTS SUPPORT TO REMOVE
CHECKPOINTS IN EAST JERUSALEM NEIGHBORHOOD

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese, per reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Palestinian residents of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Majirah say they have been cut off from their center of life by the separation barrier, and that the IDF controls access to their neighborhood via checkpoints. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) may submit a legal petition against the checkpoints, but an ACRI attorney suspects the courts will reject it on political and security grounds. She requested USG pressure to help remove two checkpoints that severely limit residents' access. Ateret Cohanim (AC), a settler organization, plans to build a residential complex in the area, called Kidmat Tzion, according to an AC spokesman. End Summary.

EAST JERUSALEM NEIGHBORHOOD:
ACCESS RESTRICTED

¶2. (C) PolOff visited the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Majirah September 25 to observe the impact of the Cliff Hotel and Sawahara checkpoints on residents' access and movement. Roughly 350 Palestinians live in the area -- members of the Qunbar and Surkhi families -- plus two settler families. Abu Majirah is located on the Jerusalem side of the separation barrier, across from the West Bank town of Abu Dis, and built on a steep hillside across the Kidron Valley (Wadi al-Nar) from the Palestinian neighborhood of Jabal al-Mukabbir. PolOff observed that access into the area is controlled by the Cliff Hotel checkpoint on the north and the Sawahara checkpoint on the south.

¶3. (C) Abu Majirah residents Einad Surkhi and Naif Qunbar told PolOff that Abu Dis was their center of life until the separation barrier cut them off from the town, including from water, electricity, and phone lines. They said the IDF only allows access to Abu Majirah for its residents, preventing visits from family, friends, and service providers. They said that members of the Surkhi family, who hold Jerusalem IDs, can enter Jerusalem, but the Qunbars, who hold West Bank IDs, can only leave Abu Majirah to go to the West Bank. They added that what was a five-minute trip to Abu Dis now takes an hour.

¶4. (C) Surkhi said the families pay Jerusalem Municipal taxes and fees and bring in water, electricity, and phone lines from the Municipality at relatively high prices. They now use Jerusalem for shopping, medical treatment, and schools, he said, but checkpoints make their access unpredictable. He said the IDF warned residents that they will be fired upon if they approach the Sawahara checkpoint, forcing them to travel through the Cliff Hotel checkpoint. Surkhi and Qunbar said, "We feel like we are in prison, but this is our home." They said their primary goal is to remove the checkpoints so that they can move freely.

ACRI ENCOURAGES DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE
TO OPEN EAST JERUSALEM CHECKPOINTS

15. (U) ACRI attorney Tali Nir told PolOff that ACRI is considering submitting a petition to Israeli courts to remove the checkpoints that restrict the movement of Palestinians to and from Abu Majirah, which, she noted, do not apply to settlers. She said the sick and elderly do not receive necessary medical treatment, while children drop out of school because buses (as well as taxis and ambulances) cannot enter Abu Majirah and many residents do not own cars. She predicted that security concerns will trump humanitarian concerns in this case, leading the courts to reject ACRI's petition. However, pressure from the USG could encourage the GoI to remove the checkpoints, she said.

ATERET COHANIM EXPECTS SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

16. (C) AC Spokesman Daniel Luria told PolOff that AC plans to expand the current settler residences into an apartment complex called Kidmat Tzion (East of Zion) with over 300 housing units. He said Jews owned the land in the early 1900s and AC is working to reestablish the claim. He said that security measures in Abu Majirah help ensure the protection of Israeli residents of the area.

MARCHESE